

# The body in the box: archiving the Egyptian mummy

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**Abstract** Linking the archive in its literal sense to the metaphorical repercussions of ‘the archive’ in a conceptual sense opens new lines of inquiry into the processes employed in museums to catalogue and store their objects. Archaeology—which was influential in Freud’s theories of memory and Derrida’s ‘Freudian impression’, *Archive Fever*—invites particular consideration in this respect, especially through the collection and interpretation of ancient Egyptian human remains. Embedded in colonial and imperial discourses of race, the Egyptian mummy confronted the West with the uncanny survival of what it had conceived as its near-double. The fates of two Egyptian bodies, a mummy dissected in the 1820s and a skeleton excavated in the 1920s, exemplify the archiving of these archaeological objects, whose multiple traces speak to what Derrida characterized as the archive’s self-destructive drive, as its objects (and bodies) resist archival containment. This theoretical point encourages museums to intervene in and through their archives, for the creation of alternative histories and futures.

**Keywords** The archive · Archival practices · Collections management · Museum storage · Human remains in museum collections · Ancient Egyptian mummification · Race science

## Introduction

In his 1919 essay ‘The Uncanny’, Freud argued that the modern individual has an almost unchanging, in fact primitive, response to the dead: ‘To many people’, he wrote, ‘the acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead

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bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts’ (Freud 2003, p. 148). The dead and other ‘doubles’ in human form—dolls, statues, artificial limbs—have the power to unsettle because they jolt us from the *heimlich* (the ‘homely’ or familiar) to the *unheimlich*, the ‘unhomely’ that Freud’s translators render as ‘uncanny’. Historian Carolyn Steedman (2011) has invoked the Freudian uncanny to argue that interaction with the dead is one of the founding acts of modern historical studies. It is foundational to several other areas of study and information science, too, and in this article, I use two of these—Egyptology and museological collecting—to explore the interface between archaeology, the museum, and the archive. I take the archive in the conventional sense familiar to archival studies as well as the conceptual sense formulated by Derrida (1996) through his own reading of Freud on archaeology, memory, and the dead. Although some scholars—Steedman among them (see Williams 2014)—have taken Derrida and Derridean-inspired explorations of the archive to task, dissatisfied with the metaphorical reach to which the philosopher’s work lends itself, I argue that it is a provocative and productive reach, especially in combination with the archaeological metaphor on which Freud and Derrida both rely. Both men had the physical traces of the ancient past in mind and to hand, Derrida finishing *Archive Fever* in proximity to the archaeological sites and museum of Naples, Freud contemplating the antiquities that crowded his Vienna apartment. Archaeology is more than a metaphor. Where, then, do its artefacts fit in the theories and practices of the archive?

Although archival theory has generated significant work in areas we might broadly characterize as postcolonial (e.g. Stoler 2009; Mbembe 2002; Richards 1993), its impact in archaeological thought has been minimal (Baird and McFadyen 2014; Lucas 2010). Only in a handful of critical histories of archaeology, which are themselves informed by postcolonial theory, does the archive take on any particular visibility (Schlanger and Nordbladh 2008; Abu el-Haj 2001). Yet in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, first delivered as a lecture at the Freud Museum in 1994, Derrida interrogated the archive’s problematic memory-function through the metaphor of Freud’s archaeological imagination—the psychic slippage that purports to let stones, and bones, ‘speak’ across time, as if they were living memories that require no enabling archive (Derrida 1996, pp. 91–101; Van Zyl 2002). Archaeologists steeped in the discipline’s material turn (or re-turn to its material roots: Hicks 2010) have also used excavation metaphors to advocate ‘archaeologies of archive’ (Ouzman 2006), whereby objects may speak of their own histories instead, for instance through the object biography. Drawing inspiration from Derrida, Baird and McFadyen (2014, p. 24) highlight the need to consider the ‘archive-as-practice’, which produces and reproduces the material forms—documents, photographs, objects—that archaeologists are trained to see as the archaeological record. The histories of objects (often housed in museums) and the histories of excavations (often housed in archives) can be conceived as accumulated traces, never as stable as the idea of a fixed, factual ‘record’ of the past implies.

The archive, as much as archaeology itself, thus functions in a metonymic fashion for layerings of loss and preservation over time. There is a further confluence between the archive and archaeology as well, for in actual archives and museum collections, the histories inherent in many archaeological records and

artefacts delineate the legacy that archaeology, the archive, and the museum share as agents of colonial influence and control. Given this shared legacy, it is striking that archival theory in the Derridean vein has not explicitly addressed the overlaps, disjunctures, and complementarities between the museum and the archive as institutions, an oversight this article confronts in hopes of bridging the realms of theory and practice. Since a simplistic separation between documents/archives (on the one hand) and objects/museums (on the other) cannot hold (Belovari 2013; Reed 2004; Schlak 2008), then the ways in which different organizational principles suited different institutional and disciplinary priorities still require further scrutiny. I suggest that historical practices of selecting, storing, and manipulating information, whether through paper-based or other material objects, developed in tandem as such practices filtered into and across museums, archives, and similar institutionalized and professionalized formations, such as the library and the public record office. It is these practices of information organization and retrieval that help provide a common denominator for ‘the archival’, regardless of the current institutional or professional alignment of the objects or data involved. From the vantage point of archival science, then, we can ask what distinguishes an archive from a museum, but even more productively, we can consider their similarities, and what it might bring to both archival science and museum studies if we view museological practices in an archival light.

### Among the mummies

My own way of thinking about the ancient Egyptian dead and their place in the archive, in its broad sense, has benefited from scrutiny of such historical practices, which in turn invites reflection on the possibilities—or restrictions—these practices create today (Riggs 2014). This is especially relevant in museums, which are responsible for so many ancient Egyptian human remains in the face of sometimes competing interests. Public display of the dead is one concern, addressed from different scholarly vantage points (summarized in Alberti et al. 2009); rarely is the ‘documentation’ (in modern museum parlance) of human remains at issue, whether in terms of current or historical practice. As this article demonstrates, however, the example of the Egyptian mummy suggests that museums and their objects struggle to overcome the archival legacy written both literally and figuratively on the body itself.

The uncanny dead that Steedman had in mind were not corpses or ghosts, but those individuals whose traces survive in the documents, letters, and ledger books of the archive, which she construes as the precursor of history writing. Steedman asserts that there has been little attempt made ‘to theorize the place of the dead and death in the human and social sciences’ (2011, p. 327), but in material culture studies (encompassing anthropology, archaeology, and museology), theoretical engagement with death and the dead is more extensive than historians like Steedman may realize (e.g. Feldman 2006; Fforde and Hubert 2006; Hallam and Hockey 2001; Krmpotich et al. 2010; Sofaer 2006). Moreover, encounters with actual dead bodies in a museum context suggest that history and other forms of knowledge—whether in the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences—are

created in and with, not ‘after’ (as Steedman’s essay title would have it), the archive. Archival technologies applied to objects, whether documents or dead bodies, have historically striven towards a utopian state of perfect knowledge and complete data (Basu and de Jong 2016). Technologies of inscription, recording, sorting, and storage are contingent in practice, prone to errors and oversights, but in intention, they are thorough, definitive, and perhaps above all, functional. Nor is practice indistinct from theory, and while there are significant divergences between Derrida’s and Foucault’s use of the archive concept (see Matthews 2015), the influential formulation of Foucault (2002) is relevant here: if the archive determines what it is possible to know, then the archive, the objects and records it stores, and the infrastructures and organizational principles it requires are difficult, if not impossible, to separate from each other, so closely enmeshed are they at any point in time. Like Freud’s uncanny doubles, which haunt us as embodiments of ‘all the suppressed acts of volition that fostered the illusion of free will’ (Freud 2003, p. 143), the archive reminds us that history has its own history and that only by revisiting the archive can alternative histories emerge.

Parsed into rags and fragments over centuries of collecting, unwrapping, and dissection, the Egyptian mummy exemplifies the interconnectedness of knowledge formation and the manipulation of the material record. The mummy’s own uncanny nature, together with ancient Egypt’s potent role as near-double of the West, has helped make mummies a distinctive focus of collecting practices, embedding them in discourses of physical anthropology, race, and biological science (Riggs 2014, pp. 41–76). In what follows, I draw on postcolonial engagements with the archive in order to apprehend the translation of mummified Egyptian remains into objects, records, data, and storage materials allied to these discursive strategies, especially in the context of the modern museum. In doing so, I posit that museums and museological processes are fundamentally archival processes, despite key differences between museums and archives. Archival studies have tended to treat the museum and the archive proper as separate institutions, concerned, respectively, with the care and display of objects and the preservation and accessibility of documents (McIsaac 2007, p. 16; Pollock 2007, pp. 12–13). The Society of American Archivists (Pearce-Moses 2005, p. 28), for instance, defines archival studies as the body of knowledge that supports the practice of appraising, acquiring, authenticating, preserving, and providing access to recorded materials. In the course of the nineteenth century, the museum and the archive did develop distinct classificatory systems, the former classifying objects according to mushrooming types, series, and schemas, the latter emphasizing the origin point and original ordering of record groups. As I discuss below, however, the techniques both institutions used to meet their separate aims bear close similarities and overlaps. This is one argument for understanding museological praxis as part of a broader archival apparatus. Another is that linking museum and archive in this way opens both to the insights of archival theory and vice versa—suggesting new ways to think about historical practices and their ongoing ramifications for archives, museums, and their publics. Derrida’s *mal d’archive* may prove more relevant to archivists and museum curators than he, or they, imagined.

## Structure of this article

The article divides into three parts. First, under the heading ‘The museum as archive’, I set out a framework for embedding analysis of the ‘behind the scenes’ work of the museum within the literature on the archive, which offers scope to move beyond the potential limitations of the object biography—the methodology on which other discussions of object histories and museum storage and classification systems have until now relied, in museum studies and cognate fields such as visual anthropology. This demonstrates the wide-ranging implications of an archival science approach and Derridean-inspired theories of the archive, while acknowledging the recognizable, and indeed purposeful, differences between museums and archives in their historical and contemporary remits alike.

‘The body in the box’ section looks at two case studies of the archival process applied to ancient Egyptian human remains—one (a mummy) from a dissection carried out in 1820s London and subsequently donated to the British Museum, and the other (a skeleton) from an excavation in 1920s Egypt, already identified in the field as destined for the Manchester Museum in the industrial north of England. These examples bear important similarities and differences: they are similar in that both are imbricated in the development and deployment of racial science, yet different in the way each body was selected, stored, and inscribed, as archival methods kept pace with institutional (and epistemological) change. The Derridean caveat, however, is that such changes are built into the archive by its nature, which is beyond—to be precise, beneath (*hypomnesia*)—memory, and thus beyond the life cycle of a discrete object or collection.

In the ‘Boxed up, boxed in’ section, I argue that the literal and figurative boxing up of the Egyptian mummy belongs to a discursive strategy attempting to confirm ancient Egypt’s place in the archive from which Western culture has defined itself—something Freud himself considered in his final work on the Egyptian origin of Moses (Freud 1939; Butler and Rowlands 2006). It was in the actual archive—with its quest to perfect a record of the past—that the bodies of the dead became ‘witnesses in spite of themselves’ (Ricouer 2004, p. 170), testaments to the West’s ‘discovery’ of Egypt and the concomitant construction of race as a fixed biological category (Bernasconi 2007; Young 1995). And it is in the archive that any challenge to tired assumptions about ancient Egypt and its dead must originate, if these boxed-up bodies are ever to be more than haunting hangovers from a colonial past.

## The museum as archive

As institutions, archives and museums are closely related but usually distinguished from each other. Archives comprise documents and legal or personal records available for consultation, and museums contain objects available for exhibition and study. Archives and museums nonetheless have several qualities in common. They assert or aspire to fixity, permanence, and comprehensiveness, although they are in fact places of fluidity, impermanence, and gaps. They share a history rooted in the knowledge-producing institutions of imperialism, founded in the certainties of

positivism and weighed down by the need to organize vast quantities of raw data in myriad forms (Richards 1993). They are examples, each in its own way, of what Eric Ketelaar (2014) has termed archivalization, whereby societies imbue caching activities with meanings that can be transmuted into cultural memories. What museums and archives also have in common is their materiality, and that very materiality works against the neat division of archives into places of paper and museums into places of things. For a start, a museum may contain an archive, or more likely archives, scattered across departments: annual reports, exhibition designs, correspondence, and files related to individual objects or collections (Wythe 2004). Staff who work in museums, especially in collections care, curation, or documentation, maintain a distinction between this archive (the museum's own records) and the collection, that is, the objects themselves.

Nonetheless, the recording, numbering, cataloguing, and finding mechanisms applied to museum objects follow many of the same techniques developed in the nineteenth century for archives in the more conventional, document-based sense (Spieker 2008, pp. 20–23). By the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, some museums had adopted the practice of using a bound paper register to mark the entrance point of an object into the museum, creating a chronological analogue of the museum's collection. Many museums maintain the title 'registrar' for the person or the office that looks after this and similar processes, long after actual registers have fallen out of use. Crucially, the stage of registration identified the object as belonging to the museum and produced a number—the registration, accession, or inventory number—which uniquely identified that object (ideally) and mediated between the object and any information that became attached to it. In this way, objects could be cross-referenced to documentation stored in the archive, such as photographs and correspondence, or files arising from conservation and research. By the late nineteenth century, registers came to be supplemented by ambitious published catalogues, almost never completed, or more commonly by card filing systems, which sometimes were. At the Egyptian Antiquities Museum in Cairo, for instance, the French-run archaeological service operated a *journal d'entrée* for all objects registered in the museum, while a published *catalogue général* written by specialist scholars appeared between the 1890s and 1930s (see Tilgner et al. 2014) and has recently been reintroduced by the American University in Cairo Press. Other museums simply relied on the register itself, so that the register and the catalogue became one and the same. Regardless of the system used, effective management of the collection also required a finding mechanism recording where the object was stored or displayed. In the past, hand lists, finding lists, or notations on index card systems have accomplished this function, which today is more often effected through a proprietary collections management database.

Swinney (2012) has characterized museum registration as a *rite de passage* through which selected objects become museum objects, dislocated from their point of origin and subject to the 'museum effect', which approaches sacralization (Alberti 2011, p. 193, with further references). Registration, or accessioning (the terms are used almost interchangeably), is a powerful tool, marking a significant act of detachment—and reattachment—as the object is gathered into the museum's archival project (Wingfield 2011; Alberti 2009, pp. 131–136). Accordingly,

Swinney suggests that the register itself (in whatever form it takes) can be understood as a boundary object—a concept developed by Star and Griesheimer (1989) in the history of science, to characterize those objects malleable enough to be used by different actors (e.g. curators, museum administrators, anthropological researchers) for individual purposes, yet stable enough to be easily recognizable and deemed reliable. The museum register, for instance, fulfils certain utilitarian requirements as a tool of information storage and retrieval, while mediating between the museum object ‘proper’ and the discrete but interlinked areas (conservation, interpretation, display) in which it operates; increasingly, online museum catalogues open some form of the register to public scrutiny as well. Boundary objects facilitate the translation of knowledge across disparate spheres, not only among communities of scholars, but also—and as importantly—funding bodies, government agencies, public users, and a range of museum staff, from gallery attendants to management.

To Star and Griesheimer (1989, pp. 392–393), the standardization of methods in museums (and in science more broadly) operated in tandem with the development of boundary objects. The one relied on the other, because shared standards for collecting objects and, crucially, managing them within the institution were part of the ‘discursive whole’ (Edwards and Hart 2004, p. 48) through which meanings accrued around the object. Edwards and Hart use a box of mounted photographs in the Pitt Rivers Museum to explore the materiality of ordering methods in a museum context—the boxes, mounts, tissue paper, and numbering systems which contribute to, or indeed comprise, the object’s multiple roles within and without the institution. Offering a biography of the box and its contents, Edwards and Hart trace what they can of its history, from the photographic prints themselves (which have disparate origins, c. 1870 to the 1920s), to their early 1930s re-mounting, at which point they were gathered (‘taken in hand’, as the museum’s annual report had it: Edwards and Hart 2004, p. 55) in a specially purchased green solander box. By the 1950s, the photographic collection had fallen out of fashion for anthropological research, leaving the box to lie dormant until renewed interest in the 1960s saw this, and other boxes of mounted photographs, re-inventoried and eventually, in the 1980s, restored in archival-quality boxes, each card interleaved with acid-free tissue.

All these backstage operations are physical practices employed to make museum objects traceable, durable, usable, and intelligible; the museum cannot function without them. Yet as Alberti (2009, pp. 123–152) has observed, these mundane, workaday procedures have been neglected in the histories of museums and their collections. Edwards and Hart (2004, p. 47) similarly draw attention to their act of closely looking at something otherwise overlooked—‘the most ubiquitous and therefore invisible of material objects: a box with things in it in the reserve collections of a museum’. They deploy the social, or cultural, biography of objects (Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999) to foreground the object and its transformations, both material and meaningful, through time. Alberti (2005) has also advocated the object biography as a way to examine how objects were implicated in human relationships via the museum-centred processes of collecting and curating. The object biography ‘provides an appealing narrative hook’ (Alberti 2005, p. 561) with the potential to elucidate networks of knowledge construction, even epistemological shifts; however, there are some limitations to the biographical



method, especially where an overly narrow focus on the object may restrict engagement with other conceptual or theoretical approaches, such as the archive. Used reductively, the object biography struggles to move beyond ‘narrative hook’ or historical description, and certain objects lend themselves better than others to biography, whether because of the active ‘lives’ they have led or—perhaps counterintuitively—because periods of dormancy have helped ‘freeze’ them in past states, still bearing the vestige of elapsed or superseded orderings like the Pitt Rivers box.

### Beyond the object biography

Thinking of such ordering practices as ‘archival’ may help refocus attention on them, but there are important differences between the classificatory principles museums and archives have employed. From the early history of public museums, objects were divided into groups, types, or schools. For example, the Louvre organized its paintings and antiquities on ‘national’ axes, with Italian and French paintings in one direction, and Greek and Egyptian antiquities in another (Duncan 1995, pp. 22–33). Although a matter of display, such principles also informed other aspects of institutional organization and, eventually, disciplinary practice. Increasing deployment of scientific taxonomies in the nineteenth century meant that museums adopted similar ordering systems behind the scenes, so entwined were disciplinary formation and collecting. With few exceptions, earlier collections like Sir Hans Sloane’s were divided across museum departments (in this case, the British Museum) rather than kept together under their original aegis. Collectors wanting to keep their collections intact went to extraordinary lengths to stipulate and enforce their wishes: Sir John Soane secured an Act of Parliament to protect his London house and its contents in 1833. In late nineteenth-century archaeology, where an emphasis on site context might seem similar to an archive’s *fonds* principle, the lure of object types and taxonomy was stronger. Objects arriving in the museum from one site might initially be registered together, but were then likely to be separated, pots with other pots, bones with other bones, and so forth. Here, there are certain parallels with the practice of appraisal that is a fundamental concern of archive studies (Cook 2011); decisions about what to collect and what to keep are as multifaceted as their ramifications. Even if the separation of collected objects within a museum was not reflected in the catalogue itself, it would usually be effected through storage, encouraged by the different physical requirements of the objects themselves.

Although a museum, by its nature, is likely to contain a wider range of material forms than an archive, both institutions rely on boundary objects, such as a register, or what we might term auxiliary objects, like the mounts, files, or storage boxes physically associated with the collection. Despite the different classificatory principles the museum and archive embraced, they shared other aims, ideals, and techniques that do argue for the archival character of museums, hence the rich potential for examining the museum in light of archival theory. (The museal character of the archive also invites consideration, but is beyond the scope of my discussion here.) Institutional practices of archiving—collections management, as it



is now known—shaped the discursive trajectories of museum objects in such a way that, even if now forgotten or erased, they threaten to deny or disturb the set of meanings formulated in the present, as Edwards and Hart (2004, pp. 47–49) have argued. I would add that this disruptive potential is inherent to the archive, broadly conceived, and fundamental to the processes of inscription and re-inscription (and boxing and re-boxing) that archiving entails. Literature on the archive thus affords a theoretical insight into the museum's archival urge, and the transformation of that urge into the twin, twining strands of practice (technique) and meaning (interpretation). To Derrida (1996, pp. 11–12), the archive begins at the breakdown of living memory (*anamnesis*, in Platonic terms): it is hypomnesic, a form of memory requiring 'documentary or monumental apparatus ... auxiliary or memorandum' and, in consequence, not a 'real' memory at all. Instead, forgetfulness is built into the archive, like a Freudian death drive. It is in, not despite, its drive for recording, for completeness, and for perfect order (hence, perfect knowledge) that the archive works against itself.

### File bodies

I return here to the example of the museum register and, in doing so, turn to a point where objects, boundary objects, and auxiliary objects converge. Throughout the twentieth century, handwritten or typewritten cards or slips replaced or augmented a bound-volume register system in some museums. The advantage of the card system was that each object, recorded on an individual card, could be organized in different ways, rather than confined to the sequence of the register; additional object cards, or cards with extra information, could be slotted in with ease. Some card systems created multiple, identical cards for each object so that cards could be filed in different categories, extracting and expanding on information in the entry registers. In the first year the Museums Association of the UK published its monthly *Museums Journal*, the intricacies of cataloguing preoccupied several of its contributors: a review of the anthropologist Adolf Meyer's book, *Über Museen des Ostens des Vereinigtes Staaten von Amerika*, was in awe of the system adopted by the Anthropological Department of the Field Columbian Museum (now the Field Museum) in Chicago, in a passage worth quoting in full:

Each new collection that comes in is provided forthwith with an accession-number and an accession-card. On the card are written, besides the accession-number, the name of the collector, mode of acquisition, number of specimens, and, in a word, all facts concerning the collection as a whole. It is placed, with all the lists and letters referring to the collection, in a strong envelope, which also bears the reference-number and name of the collection. This envelope is placed in the historical file, while a duplicate of it and its contents is made for the archives. For each object in the collection is now written a slip, containing the name of the object, a drawing if necessary, race, locality, name of collector, and position in the museum, as well as a number, which is also placed on the object. All this is now written in the register of the department, and the accession-number is affixed to both slip and entry. The slips are now

placed together in a card-catalogue case, under the accession-number; and every such set of slips is separated by a guide-slip. Finally, the collection is entered alphabetically in a large volume, under the names of the collector, the locality, and the race. Thus one can find out at once from what race or parts of the earth the museum has collections; also what collectors, donors, or dealers are represented. The accession-number directs one to the historic file, the register, or the slip-catalogue. The number on each specimen refers one to the register, and so to the accession-number and all that it implies (Bather 1902, pp. 290–291).

‘So complicated a system’, Meyer observed, ‘demands much writing labour’, but his reviewer agreed that the ‘excellent order’ it produced was worth the effort. That Meyer—himself the director of the Anthropological and Ethnographic Museum in Dresden (now the Museum für Völkerkunde)—had spent time studying American museums’ cataloguing, storage, and display methods, in a book then reviewed and summarized for British museum professionals, underscores the centrality of these practices at the height of the museum age.

Card filing systems did not originate in the museum, however, but were imported and adapted from library- and office-based uses—perhaps the most famous example being the card filing system and associated office furniture devised by Alphonse Bertillon in 1880s Paris for the recording and classification of criminal types. Bertillon applied to criminal suspects the same techniques of physical measurement (anthropometry) and photography used by colonial officials and ethnographers in the field. *Bertillonage* thus drew on race science and the related use of physiognomy to identify, or indeed predict, moral character. A highlight of the French Pavilion at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the Bertillon system was sold to police forces throughout the world and is best remembered for its role in criminal investigation (Pavlich 2009; Burg 1976, p. 213). But Bertillon and his system were both part of a wider network in which ideas and techniques for the physical recording of human bodies circulated: in the pages of *Man*, Gray (1905) suggested refinements to the Bertillon card system of interest to anthropologists, while eugenicist Francis Galton—a correspondent, and sometime critic, of Bertillon—was among the visitors to his Paris studio, where he was duly measured and photographed for a criminal card (Pearson 1924, pl. LII opposite p. 383).

The Bertillon system and the eugenics research of Francis Galton were the central case studies deployed by Allan Sekula (1986) in his seminal article ‘The Body and the Archive’, which linked the use of technologies such as photography, anthropometry, and archival indexing to the formation of ideas about what constituted a criminal. The archive allowed bodies—in this case, criminal bodies—to be turned into texts, photographs, and index cards, and the archive then produced recognizable ‘types’ and classes of bodies, especially bodies that lay outside the norm. These bodies entered the archive through textual, numeric, and photographic practices, but their existence in the archive was a material one as well, not only on cards and in photographs, but also in the furniture that was an essential part of Bertillon’s scheme, including drawers for the cards, storage cabinets for related files, and working space for the trained cataloguers (Robertson 2005; Fig. 1). Nor



**Fig. 1** The filing cabinets or *armoires de classification* used for the Bertillon system, from a photograph used to promote its sale in the 1890s. Image in the public domain, after a print in the author's collection

was the regime of order suggested by the Bertillon system and its rigorous wooden furnishings, with their issues of specification and supply, unique to *Bertillonage*. The *Museums Journal* review of Meyer's book on American museums detailed the materials (wood or metal) and use of fixing rods for card index drawers, the manufacturers and suppliers of cards and index books, a useful source for tin storage boxes, and the structure of 'ingenious' Field Museum display cases fitted with easily opened doors and concealed storage drawers underneath (Bather 1902, pp. 288–290, 291–293). Whether in card files or registers, or for that matter in the digital formats adopted today, the means of storing data was and remains fundamental to the character of that data, just as the means of storing objects, on shelves, in drawers, or in boxes, was and remains fundamental to the object and to the ways in which the object was, and could be, thought about. The register, the box number, and the storage box itself all fix ideas to the object—or the body—that is their *raison d'être*.

In museums, human bodies have also been turned into texts, photographs, and other forms of documentation, each with their own materiality—but unlike the bodies in the Bertillon files, they remain as bodies or body parts, museal objects which require the auxiliary means of storage or display in order to fulfil their varied roles. The ancient Egyptian remains that are my focus here include whole mummified bodies, wrapped or unwrapped; skeletal remains, complete or incomplete; and multiple samples and fragments from either of these, whether acquired separately like the mummified hands and feet that were mainstays of Victorian tourist purchases, or the fingernail clippings, skin scrapings, extracted teeth, and hair clippings that have been staples of scientific research into Egyptian mummies and mummification. Through their collecting and archiving (as I have argued that it is), ancient Egyptian human remains have become part of larger narratives, about the individual presumed to have inhabited the body; about the archaeologists, scientists, or collectors associated with the remains, often in a colonial context; and about ancient Egypt and the Egyptian mummy as tropes of death, disease, danger, the

erotic, and the exotic, in various combinations (Montserrat 1998). Discussions of ‘mummymania’ (Day 2006) have focused almost exclusively on exhibitionary practices and popular culture mythologies around the Egyptian mummy. But the archive is where ideas about the mummified body have been formulated and reformulated, raising the spectre of the uncanny—ancient Egypt as near-double of the West, forebear and Other in one corpse—from the hands of the surgeon, the archaeologist, and the curator.

## The body in the box

How does the object exist in the archive, especially when that object has been subject to as many techniques, and fantasies, as the Egyptian mummy? I present here two case studies—object biographies, in their way—that exemplify archival practices in relation to the mummy and the museum, first the assemblage of specimens prepared in the 1820s, and now in the British Museum, and second the skeleton destined for the Manchester Museum in the 1920s. Like Edwards and Hart’s ‘mixed box’, each example preserves the traces of earlier archiving practices thanks in part to fairly benign institutional neglect. They are in some ways singular examples, but they speak to more generic trends, the first arising in the early decades of any practice one could characterize as ‘museal’ and the second firmly within the discourse of cataloguing, classification, storage, and the body discussed above. These boxed bodies represent two distinct historical stages in techniques of collecting and archiving objects, in particular the ancient Egyptian mummy. It is this particularity that helps us see the impact of the archive in its wider sense—for each body entered the archive as a signifier of race, one of the dominant concerns of the colonial era and its archival traces.

### Dr Granville’s mummy

Egyptian mummies, and parts of mummies, were nothing new to Europe by the time the physician and ‘male midwife’ (obstetrical surgeon) Augustus Bozzi Granville set about unwrapping and dissecting a mummy in 1822—the original archiving process of my first example, known today as ‘Dr Granville’s mummy’ (Riggs 2014, pp. 49–56; Riggs 2016). A brisk trade in powdered *mumia* operated for medicinal purposes in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and whole mummies (some now identified as forgeries) or parts of mummies sometimes featured in collections of curiosities, like those of Hans Sloane and Peter Paul Rubens. When the *savants* attached to the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt acquired mummified heads at Luxor, one was earmarked as a gift for Empress Josephine. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, however, the preserved bodies of ancient Egyptians offered more than curiosity value: Johann Blumenbach, whose work on natural history divided humankind into five distinct races, studied mummies in order to place the ancient Egyptians in his scheme (‘Ethiopian’, he thought), a challenge that natural historians and physician–anatomists like Georges Cuvier in France, James Pritchard in the UK, and Samuel Morton in the USA soon took up, drawing contradictory

conclusions (Pritchard sided with Blumenbach, while Cuvier and Morton argued that the Egyptians were ‘Caucasian’ types or sub-types: see Champion 2003).

Medical science, as it emerged in the early nineteenth century, was ideally positioned to contribute to the emanant construction of race, not to mention that of gender and the study of disease. It was against this backdrop that Granville devoted six weeks to the anatomical analysis of an Egyptian mummy given to him by one of his patients. The unwrapping took place at Granville’s London home, with colleagues and students invited around to observe and discuss the process. The bulk of the time was devoted to dissecting this ‘most perfect specimen’, the body of an older woman whose heavy breasts and skeletal proportions Granville first measured with care, observing too the shaved head and body hair that stubbled the skin’s surface. Granville made preparations of the mummy’s skin (including the perineum), muscle fibres, and organs, notably an ovarian growth he judged to have been the cause of death. The skull and pelvis deserved particular attention because, as Granville reasoned when presenting his results to the Royal Society, the race of the female skeleton could be identified as securely from the latter as the former, if not more so. Citing Cuvier—and using Cuvier’s method of identifying race from facial profile angles, itself derived from that of eighteenth-century Dutch anatomist Pieter Camper—Granville characterized the mummy as Caucasian. To prove the point beyond doubt, at his Royal Society lecture Granville presented the mummy’s pelvis next to the pelvis of a ‘Negro girl’ he also had to hand, presumably acquired through his own medical practice (Riggs 2014, p. 54).

When the dissection was complete, Granville commissioned a wooden cabinet with glazed drawers and sectioned compartments, in which he arranged the specimens prepared from the organs, muscle, and skin, as well as seeds, resin, and bitumen found among the mummy wrappings (Fig. 2). The specimens were laid out in the compartments for maximum visibility, with handwritten cards that label each



**Fig. 2** One of the specimen drawers housing fragments of ‘Dr Granville’s Mummy’. British Museum EA 75991 (or 1853,0927.2). Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, under Creative Commons license By-NC-SA 4.0

specimen pinned to the paper lining of the drawer; conservation treatment at the British Museum in 1998 preserved as much of this arrangement as possible—apparently original to the late 1820s or early 1830s, and certainly predating Granville's 1853 donation of the specimen case and coffin lid to the museum. Granville's method of boxing the prepared remains was done with demonstration in mind, and is in keeping with the preparation of anatomy and pathology specimens in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by medical specialists themselves, many of whom took pride in forming such collections and thus displaying their manual, and intellectual, dexterity (see Alberti 2011, pp. 14–18, 103–106; Riggs 2016). Granville may have used the glazed drawers in subsequent lectures he gave on Egyptian mummification at the Royal Institution, recounted in his autobiography (Granville 1874, II, pp. 209–210; Riggs 2014, pp. 55). Also incorporated in the cabinet were other materials related to Granville's study of mummification, including the legs and arms of stillborn fetuses (again, almost certainly from his medical practice) which he had prepared according to what he presumed were ancient embalming techniques (Granville 1874, II, pp. 211).

In bringing together material forms (human remains, textiles, plant and mineral samples) that later museum classifications kept separate, Granville's specimen case owes much to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century anatomical practices. Yet it also exemplifies the principle of *respect des fonds* that would emerge in archival science by the mid-nineteenth century (see Meehan 2014), and to this day, the cabinet and its varied contents remain united through their association with Granville himself. Until the 1853 donation, the cabinet remained in Granville's possession, at home, together with the associated coffin lid and samples of linen removed from the mummy; it is unclear what became of the bones and skull that had been such a point of interest in discussing the mummy's race. With its neatly written labels, divided drawers, and glazing, Granville's cabinet suggests that at this point, archiving the mummy entailed visibility as much as containment, and text as much as object—although not yet any systems of numbering or registration. These would come once the coffin lid and cabinet entered the British Museum, where they were assigned a number starting with the registration date: 27 September 1853 (now written 1853, 0927), followed by .1 for the coffin lid and .2 for the cabinet as the first and second objects registered that day. In keeping with concerns about cataloguing arrangements in the British Museum, which were the subject of Parliamentary investigations during the same decade (see Moser 2006, pp. 174–176), curator Samuel Birch began a parallel register specific to the Egyptian collection, coded 'EA' for Egyptian antiquities and numbered in a continuous, ongoing sequence. Hence, the coffin lid became EA 29781, but the cabinet has the higher (i.e. later) number EA 75991, assigned only in the 2000s. Several pieces of associated textiles are likewise numbered EA 75992 to 76014. These textiles and a tissue specimen were not registered at all in the museum until 2005, a fate all too common as museum collections grew and ideas about what and how to register objects changed.<sup>1</sup> By 2005, they were still wrapped in paper with an

<sup>1</sup> To view all the items donated by Granville, use the Advanced Search functionality of the British Museum's online catalogue, entering 'Dr Augustus Bozzi Granville' in the 'People and Organisations' search field: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/search.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx) (last accessed 12 April 2016).



1832 watermark and labelled (as ‘mummy compresses’) in a similar nineteenth-century hand to that deployed in the cabinet drawers.

Tellingly, in the archaeologist Flinders Petrie’s (1904) handbook *Methods and Aims in Archaeology*, he advised excavators against labelling only the wrapping paper placed around objects, ‘which may be all thrown away’ (Petrie 1904, p. 52)—a pointed rejection of labelling techniques like those deployed for the Granville material. A few decades on from Granville’s donation, and even longer since the cabinet had been so carefully prepared, Petrie raged against the failings of ‘blue-blooded *dilettante* collectors’, whose inadequate recording techniques meant that ‘[o]ur museums are ghastly charnel-houses of murdered evidence; the dry bones of objects are there, bare of all the facts of grouping, locality, and dating which would give them life and value’ (Petrie 1904, p. 48). Although Granville could hardly be blamed for the British Museum’s application of its own recording techniques, or for the means by which his mummy had been acquired, he himself was disappointed by the treatment of his cabinet in the museum’s Egyptian galleries. It was in a large glass case, he wrote, but not displayed ‘in the manner best adapted for the instruction or the amusement of the public’, since both the ancient specimens and his foetal experiments were confined as if in ‘a *museum clausum*, as some funny gentleman appertaining to the museum once said to me’ (Granville 1874, II, pp. 211). From the description, it appears that Granville’s dissatisfaction hinged on the issue of visibility: the museum seems to have shut the neatly labelled and partitioned drawers of his cabinet.

The archival trajectory of ‘Dr Granville’s mummy’—from cutting-edge science in the 1820s to outdated embarrassment (reading between the lines) in less than half a century—is important for understanding the emphasis on cataloguing, classifying, and physically ordering collections and information, of all kinds, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The new vigour of the archival impulse, exemplified by Bertillon’s cards and filing cabinets, arose in response to preceding methods of archiving and storage, offering innovations with the utopic aim of not only improving but perfecting the processing of objects and information. Like all utopias, it depended on the rejection, supplanting, and even erasure of what had come before. And because these archival practices were materially embedded in the day-to-day work of institutions like the museum, and thence in the discourse of several fields of expertise, it can be argued that they were drivers of, not simply reactions to, epistemological change. Registers, card files, specimen boxes, and storage drawers may represent boundaries and auxiliaries in relation to the objects that were the primary focus of collecting and interpretation activity, but they were fundamental in developing ways of thinking about the ‘dry bones’ they contained.

### Skeleton O3353

The museum and its archival processes similarly had more influence on the aims and operation of related fields, such as archaeology, than they have often been credited with. The expansion of a colonial infrastructure in Egypt, especially after British forces occupied the country in 1882, facilitated large-scale excavations and the subsequent division of finds between the French-run antiquities service and a host of



European and North American museums. Museums were not passive recipients, however, but active instruments whose interests were uppermost in the minds of archaeologists like Petrie when deciding what to keep and record in the field (Stevenson 2014). Thus, though Petrie's *Methods and Aims* manual emphasized field recording (1904, pp. 48–59), these overlapped with the techniques that were used (or should be used) in museums; a chapter on packing and unpacking antiquities—how to build a crate, what cushioning materials to use—was grounded entirely in the shipment of antiquities to museums overseas (Petrie 1904, pp. 105–113). Petrie warned that ‘unpacking is generally left in museums to be done by rough labourers, who may entirely overlook needful precautions or even throw away the most valuable things in the boxes’, repeating his caution against labelling only an object's wrappings (Petrie 1904, pp. 112). In the early twentieth century regime of order, the vicissitudes of previous archival regimes were to be avoided in favour of an over-arching logic—but what logic did the Egyptian mummy now have?

Petrie's work in Egypt is the source of my second example, another fragmented body—this time stored in a wooden drawer with brass runners (Fig. 3), here seen in a low-resolution photograph taken in the storerooms of the Manchester Museum in late 2005, for database records. The storage cabinet to which the drawer belonged, likely dating to the 1920s or 1930s, was by then long gone, or at least impossible to identify anywhere else in the museum. The drawer, with its skeletal contents, sat on a high shelf, uncovered and apparently untouched for a considerable length of time. It contained the skeleton of an adult male, minus the skull, derived from Petrie's 1922 excavations at the site of Abydos in southern Egypt, where the first kings of Egypt were buried. The excavations operated under the auspices of the British School of Archaeology in Egypt—not a government-backed entity, as its name



**Fig. 3** Drawer containing skeleton O3353, in storage at the Manchester Museum in 2005. The low resolution of this digital image reflects standard institutional practice at the time for documentation records. Author's photograph

suggests, but an organization Petrie founded in 1905 to coordinate and raise money for his own activities in the field.

While in some ways the Manchester Museum drawer may seem more random in its arrangement, and its isolation, than Granville's—an impression exacerbated by the evident lack of conservators' intervention, and the film of black dust on the surfaces—it is in fact an orderly and complex bringing together of object and archival documentation in one place, and as aesthetic in its layout as the Granville cabinet. Two identical cardboard boxes with lids, on each of which is written 'Part of skeleton O3353' (underscored), contain the hand and foot bones and are aligned in one corner of the drawer. Around them are the long bones, sacrum, and scattered vertebrae. A card dated 7 August 1922 and written in the same hand as the cardboard boxes—identifiable as the handwriting of the assistant-in-charge, Winifred Crompton—again identifies the skeleton by the number assigned in the museum registration process: O3353. According to the registration system Manchester had adopted in the late nineteenth century, the alphabetic prefix 'O' associated this object with ethnographic, not Egyptological, material (Alberti 2009, pp. 132–134). As we will see, this was a significant choice not only for the skeleton's 'life' as a museum object, but also for what it reveals about the motivation for collecting the skeleton in the first place. The handwritten card goes on to state the excavation site, tomb number, and date, as well as the donor (the British School) and a parenthetical note that the skull and lower jaw had been stored separately. If the note and the arrangement of the bones in this drawer are contemporaneous, as I suspect they are, then the drawer was too shallow to accommodate the cranium. The registration number O3353 is inked onto each bone, in some cases almost overwriting the earlier, pencilled annotation 541, which was the tomb number assigned to the burial in the excavation record. 'Every bone of a skeleton should be marked, and always on one fixed position for each bone', Petrie had advised in *Methods and Aims* (Petrie 1904, p. 51). Last and not least, also placed in the drawer is a photographic print of the skeleton in situ, the photograph being well established by this time for its usefulness in producing typologies of difference, whether of living humans (in anthropology) or of objects, including archaeologically recovered human remains.

The documentation with the bones, including the photograph, connects these skeletal remains to a larger archive stemming from Petrie's work at Abydos, which lies on the west bank of the Nile around 450 km south of Cairo. The skeleton was one among many preserved in some 500 brick-lined graves in the low desert plateau. Positioned in neat rows, the graves are contemporary with the burials of Egypt's earliest kings and date to the First Dynasty, c. 2950 to 2775 BC; they may contain—as Petrie surmised—the bodies of members of the royal entourage, put to death at the time of the king's burial (O'Connor 2009, pp. 172–174). The question of whether these individuals were conscious at the time of burial drew Petrie's attention to skeletons like 541, whose arrangement in the grave might have suggested 'conscious action', one arm spread out as if attempting to raise the arm—uncannily alive and dead at once (Petrie 1925, p. 8). In Petrie's published report, the skeleton from tomb 541 can be traced through this textual narrative, to the photographic plates (an image identical to the print in the storage drawer), to the

excavation registers (that archival word again), which charted what he considered each burial's key characteristics (Petrie 1925, p. 8, pls. xiv [photograph], xvi [plan of graves], xx [register]). From this, we learn how rare the skeleton's survival is, for almost all the other bones from the Abydos graves were buried together at the site:

The bones of the first dynasty burials were collected; of the skulls I measured 80 in fifteen dimensions, paraffined them, and 60 were brought to the Eugenics Department, University College. The long bones I measured, of 96 individuals, and then reburied them in a pit in the fort of [king] Khosekhemui where we lived (Petrie 1925, p. 9).

The Manchester skeleton was one of only two preserved in full; the other, from tomb 537, joined the skulls selected for the eugenics laboratory founded by Petrie's late friend and UCL colleague Francis Galton, whose use of statistics and composite photography had done so much to establish techniques of archival control over the body (Sekula 1986).

### Writing race on the archival body

Here is the connecting thread between these two Egyptian bodies, archived one hundred years apart, each according to the methodologies and scientific rationale of its day. The respective archival practices were inextricable from the colonial and imperial discourse of race, which they did not reflect but actively helped construct. Where Granville engaged with the work of natural scientists like Blumenbach and Cuvier, Petrie engaged with techniques of racial classification that had developed in anthropology and archaeology out of such initial forays, in tandem with the development of measuring and recording methods such as anthropometry, craniometry, and photography (Stocking 1987; Young 1995; Challis 2013; Gange 2013, pp. 289–301). Galton's theories informed Petrie's thinking in several ways, including his identification of what he termed the 'new' or 'Dynastic' race, who invaded Egypt from the north, via the Levant. These invaders were, he thought, responsible for changes in material culture identified in the archaeological record, which preceded the formation of Egypt's early state; in other words, new and better blood led to new and better forms of material culture and social organization (Sheppard 2010). To Petrie, the First Dynasty skeletons at Abydos represented the next stage of racial (and thus cultural) development in Egyptian history. Although bodies of the same period, even from the same site, were wrapped in resin-soaked linen in an early form of mummification, Petrie's excavation did not observe traces of soft tissues or wrapping on these particular remains. Instead, their bare bones lent themselves readily to anthropometric techniques and determined their next destinations, either the UCL laboratory or the ethnography—not Egyptology—collection of the Manchester Museum.

Stored separately, as the curator's handwritten annotation in the drawer records, the missing skull of the Manchester skeleton is an archival absence that underscores the centrality of race in the larger project of archiving the Egyptian mummy. The depth of the drawer may have precluded its inclusion with the rest of the bones, but so too might other uses to which it was put in the museum, for teaching or display.

By 2005, when I photographed the lone drawer during a survey of ancient Egyptian human remains in the collection, the whereabouts of the skull were uncertain. Dozens of skulls from multiple sources had been re-boxed, and in some cases registered or re-registered, a few years before I came to work at the museum. The responsible researchers had identified each skull as ‘Negroid’ or ‘Egyptian’ on the storage boxes and in the bound register, based on criteria that were never specified. Was the skull from Abydos tomb 541 among those boxes, re-numbered and hence overlooked? The archival trail of the skeleton had already taken at least one turn since the bones were laid in the drawer: at some point, O3353 was re-registered—but the bones not re-marked—with an Egyptology sequence number 6785, turning it into a double of itself under the purview of both ethnography and Egyptology (which were in Crompton’s joint control until her death in 1932; Alberti 2009, p. 71). In the typewritten register entry for 6785, the tomb number was transposed to 415, as a result of which the current database record (composed without seeing the assemblage in the drawer) expresses uncertainty over which tomb number is correct.<sup>2</sup>

The palimpsestic nature of the archive, which has made it such a productive conceptual framework for historians, philosophers, and contemporary artists (among others), is integral to its material make-up, too: we might say that the palimpsest is in the archive’s very bones. The registering, recording, and storage or mounting history of a museum object is part of its object biography, charting its relationship to communities of practice and their constructions of knowledge. But as practices that also help connect the object to an archive beyond the museum, these actions can further be understood, and interrogated, through theories of the archive. In fact, a deeper engagement with archival science and archival theory appears to me to be essential to any effective critique of museological practices and disciplinary histories—all the more so where that most ‘archival’ of disciplines, archaeology, is at stake. Greater dialogue between museum and archive studies offers a benefit at the level of both theory and practice, which are, or should be, in any case intertwined. My focus here on what is archival about the museum is one example, another being the reverse—what is museal about the archive? ‘The object’ is as constructed as the archives that have conjured and sustained its existence: we cannot apprehend one without the other.

The archive fever Derrida (1996, p. 91) diagnoses is a ‘compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire’ to revert to a place of perceived origin, which is what makes the archaeological metaphor of his, and Freud’s, arguments so apt. Recognizing the constructed nature of the archive and its indebtedness to structures of patriarchal power should facilitate the only return that is possible, namely, revisiting the archive to enable other orderings to be made and other stories to be told; it is Derrida’s call for a democratization of the archive that has made the concept a powerful tool in postcolonial studies (Harris 2005; compare Matthews 2015 on ‘archival activism’). Created under conditions of power imbalances and in the service of racial science, actual archaeological archives, such as the ancient

<sup>2</sup> At <http://harbour.man.ac.uk/mmcustom/EgyptQuery.php>, enter ‘6785’ for an ‘anyfield’ search, yielding nine objects; the skeleton is the last of these (last accessed 12 April 2016).

Egyptian human remains I have considered here, are ripe for decolonization—which more numbers or better boxes only frustrate, rather than enable. More numbers and better boxes, or more detailed finding aids and larger databases, may be the desiderata of professional archive and collections management, often with sound reasons. But used uncritically, they serve only as another overlay on the palimpsest. Disruption must start from first principles.

### Boxed up, boxed in

In this paper, I have emphasized the extent to which objects, documents, photographs, and the apparatus of registration, labelling, and storage operate together to make and remake meanings in the museum and the archive. The two institutions are not identical, but I have argued that their similarities, more than their differences, make a productive site for exploring the operations and impacts of archival technologies. Beyond the object biography, which retains a museological focus on ‘the object’, the processes through which museums have organized objects lend themselves to interrogation in the light of archival science and, in particular, postmodern or postcolonial approaches to the archive (on which see Hardiman 2009). What was meant to be fixed in order to make purported facts both inviolable and obvious, like Granville’s or Petrie’s conclusions, turned out to be mutable: within his own lifetime, Granville saw his efforts rejected by the British Museum, and skeleton O3353 was eventually reassigned the number 6785, its drawer divorced from its cabinet (and its head from its body) to lie virtually forgotten for decades. In both museums, the registers too are now deemed redundant, superseded by the utopian possibilities of the digital collections management database. Such databases have the potential to offer radically different approaches to classification, for instance adding multiple categories and alternative interpretations, but in reality, they require time-consuming data entry often left to volunteers and low-paid assistants, and devoid of engagement with critical theories of the archive.

Mounts and storage facilities also aspire to more perfect conditions: I myself was responsible for devising and starting to implement new storage conditions for some of the Egyptian human remains in Manchester, as part of a process of identifying what the collection contained, matching the physical objects to their documentation, and, I had hoped, beginning to reconfigure how they were thought about and used within and beyond the institution. As Ouzman (2006) observes, however, ‘[m]useums’ attempt to reinvent themselves as socially engaged places of memory are hindered by an embedded desire to catalogue, conserve, and display objects’. The archival urge (one reading of Derrida’s *mal d’archive*) is incompatible with ‘new museology’-type ambitions or readings ‘against the grain’ unless resistance, rather than replication and refinement, is foregrounded in the process. This requires commitment on the part of individual practitioners as well as institutions. Otherwise, as in my own experience, the only results are more complete database entries and new storage materials—boxes, tissue paper, Tyvek<sup>®</sup>—of ‘archival quality’.

## Archaeology and the archive

The cardboard box and the storage cabinet have been tropes of the archive *par excellence* in the careers of contemporary artists like Mark Dion or Susan Hiller, whose work has critiqued the ‘representational totality and institutional integrity’ of the museum and its collections (Foster 2004). Discussing her 1994 exhibition at the Freud Museum, Hiller emphasized that the cardboard boxes comprising the installation *From the Freud Museum* were archaeological collecting boxes, each enclosing its own installation of collected objects and images:

When archaeologists do their fieldwork they carefully place all the interesting things found in a ‘neutral’ box. Then a series of hands-on acts transpires: sorting, cleaning, putting into plastic bags, reading, making notes and maps, even repairing—I always enjoyed these activities [Hiller trained as an archaeologist and anthropologist]. Out of them come typologies and chronologies. So by putting the remnants that I collect into these boxes I’m using the box as a frame to draw attention to something placed within it. [...] A box within a vitrine within a room within this institutional space within this house—one is attempting to carve out a space in which something else can happen, to make some kind of intervention (Hiller 2006, p. 45).<sup>3</sup>

Paralleling the argument Derrida would make in his own Freud Museum presentation just two months later (Hiller spoke in April 1994, Derrida in June), the artist questioned Freud’s archaeological metaphor, with its suggestion that psychoanalysis, even more than archaeology, could reliably reconstruct the past because the mind, unlike the earth, preserved each fragment of memory. ‘For me’, she said, ‘having been trained in archaeology, I know archaeology doesn’t necessarily tell any truth. It’s a series of fictions, like any narration. We have a choice among these histories and fictions’ (Hiller 2006, pp. 44).

Histories and fictions: where ancient Egypt is at stake, these invariably concern themselves with the conflicted and unstable position of Egypt as Other to, yet also forebear of, the West. This disrupted or disputed status is the hallmark of the archival trauma Derrida explored, and it is at junctures of trauma that processes of archiving, memory-work, and museum work acquire particular urgency (Butler 2007, pp. 35–37). The West’s imagined loss of an Egypt that Judaeo-Christian traditions considered their intellectual and spiritual home is one such trauma, explored at length in Freud’s own study of Moses (Freud 1939; see Butler and Rowlands 2006; Derrida 1996, pp. 33–81; Yerushalmi 1991) and reflected in Jan Assmann’s work on cultural memory (Assmann 1995, 1998, 2006). Bridging that gap and bringing Egypt back into the fold have arguably been one impetus for collecting Egyptian antiquities in the first place, though the meanings subsequently made through their ordering and re-ordering serve not so much to heal the wound as to keep it open.

<sup>3</sup> The installation is now in the Tate collection: see <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hiller-from-the-freud-museum-t07438> (last accessed 12 April 2016).



Studied and stored as an anatomical specimen, and hence an index of racial categorization, the Egyptian mummy has played an especially significant role in this respect. The mummy's own instability emerges not only from its Egyptianness, but also from its uncanniness, where embalming and archaeological survival have caused the corpse to endure for a longer time, and in more complete form, than the dead by rights should do. The archiving, in every sense, of the Egyptian mummy has depended on its status as a human corpse that could be divided, recorded, filed, and boxed, in keeping with other 'dividual' remains (Alberti 2011, pp. 7–8, 68–74). Even apparently whole mummies were fragmented by the removal of their wrappings, the exploratory probing of the friable remains, and the snipping of samples (hair, nails, organ tissue), something to which other antiquities were rarely subject. With the forensic turn of the late twentieth century (Keenan and Weizman 2012), a scientific approach to Egyptian mummies remains as influential as ever, adding three-dimensional CT scans and facial reconstructions to the archive of dissected bodies, skeletal measurements, and photographic typologies (Riggs 2014, pp. 194–198, 207–213).

Granville's mummy and skeleton O3533 remind us that human remains are objects too, material things that will not lie flat in a filing system and therefore require mounts, shelves, drawers, and the proverbial boxes to support and contain them. Like the Bertillon cards and their filing drawers, the material presence of these objects (their format, size, and shape, as well as their humanness) both contributes to and works against the archiving process—one reason why museums seem to require ever improved systems of numbering, storage, and digital management. Such refinements strive for one kind of utopian archive, where all information, all knowledge, all authority, will be perfect and complete, even though its objects are anything but. The archaeological archive is distinctive in this sense, its material remains in fragments and ruins by their nature. It was the archaeologist's vaunted ability to read a culture from fragments and stratigraphy that informed Freud's articulation of memory and the subconscious. Hence, the 'incessant tension' Derrida (1996, p. 92) identified between archaeology and the archive, whereby the desire to return to an imagined point of origin is frustrated by the archive's incompleteness, inaccessibility, or impossible standards of exactitude.

However, there is another utopia opened up by Derrida's reading of the archive, whereby these objects hold an as-yet-unrealized potential for institutional, professional, disciplinary, and social critique. The incorporation of the Egyptian dead into the archive was implicated in questions of race and cultural origin, which developed with, not after, the techniques of cataloguing and craft that were applied to body parts and other objects in their museal lives. The silence that surrounds this history stems not from the primal revulsion or attraction of the Freudian uncanny so much as a forgetting of the colonial context in which Egyptian collections—and archival memory—were formed. Only by breaking the silence, and drawing



attention to the auxiliaries, boundaries, and lacunae of the archive, can a different order and an alternative, future history emerge. The museum has put the body in the box; the challenge museums face today is not to keep the body boxed in.

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